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School Health Index

A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide
2004

Planning for Improvement

Web site: www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/SHI

Planning for Improvement

Note: Complete this section after all modules have been scored and you are ready to take action.

We all share the same goal: to develop healthy children who come to school ready and able to learn. Among the hundreds of individual actions you can take to meet this goal, you've already begun the most important one – appraising your school's strengths and weaknesses. No matter how your school scores on the *School Health Index*, you now have the information you need to start planning for a healthier school.

Taking Action, One Step at a Time

After all eight module teams have completed their sections of the *School Health Index*, it is time to summarize the results, reflect on your school's strengths, identify and discuss areas that need improvement, and plan for making improvements.

This section, Planning for Improvement, contains two forms, the Overall Score Card and the School Health Improvement Plan, that will help you make the best use of the information collected by each module team.

The four action steps described in this section can help you plan improvements and implement recommended changes.

Step 1:   Complete the Overall Score Card
Step 2:   Complete the School Health Improvement Plan
Step 3:   Implement recommendations
Step 4:   Reassess annually and strive for continuous improvement

Step 1: Complete the Overall Score Card

Use the completed module Score Cards to fill in the Overall Score Card (see page 5 of this section). The completed Overall Score Card will help you determine which of the eight areas covered by the *Index* are most in need of improvement. A low score for a module indicates that the school is not performing well in an area, whereas a high score indicates that it is performing well.

Step 2: Complete the School Health Improvement Plan

Bring together the full *School Health Index* team for its second meeting (see overhead transparencies in Instructions, page 9). At this meeting:

- Ask each module team to present its self-assessment and the two or three actions they believe should be implemented first.
- Decide on several actions that the school can realistically commit to implementing over the course of the year. Having a relatively small number of recommended actions is important, because pushing for too many changes at once can be overwhelming and reduce your chances of success. Module actions not included in the School Health Improvement Plan can be addressed later.

- The group may consider different criteria in deciding which actions to implement first. Some very important actions may be too expensive, too labor-intensive, or too complex to address in the short term. Others may be less important, but require fewer resources and thus may be easier to implement. It's always a good idea to start with some goals that you are confident can be met in the short term; having some early successes will generate enthusiasm for your efforts. Use the collective judgment and knowledge of your team members. Together, the team knows the school and can arrive at the best mix of important and achievable recommendations.

- Have the team complete the School Health Improvement Plan form (see a sample completed form on page 9) as follows:
  - **Actions column**: Write the agreed-upon actions in order of priority.
  - **Steps column**: Write brief descriptions of all the specific steps that need to be taken to implement an action. Examples of action steps include collecting information on the issue, preparing a slide presentation, making presentations at staff and PTA meetings, scheduling a meeting with the school board, and drafting a new school policy.
  - **By Whom and When column**: Write the name of the person who will be responsible for planning and implementing the action steps and the targeted completion date.

- Decide who will prepare a concise report that summarizes the School Health Improvement Plan, as well as all the recommended actions from all the modules. This report can be presented to the school administrators (or the site decision-making team) for approval and inclusion in the overall School Improvement Plan, and it can guide future school health planning efforts.

- Discuss how the team will monitor implementation of the School Health Improvement Plan and when the team will meet again.

Step 3: Implement Recommendations

When your School Health Improvement Plan has been approved, implement the recommendations and monitor progress. Review the Resources section at the end of the *School Health Index* to identify materials and organizations that can help you implement your actions. Because many actions will require the adoption of new school policies, a particularly valuable

resource is *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide*, published by the National Association of State Boards of Education (www.nasbe.org/healthyschools/fithealthy.mgi).

Some actions can be handled quickly and easily by one team member, whereas others may require information gathering, fundraising, or a group effort. A full discussion of project management is beyond the scope of this document, but here are some general principles:

- **Workgroups.** Form implementation workgroups so that no single person is overwhelmed with responsibility.
- **Short-term and long-term goals**. Most positive changes will take some time to put in place, but delayed gratification can be frustrating for many volunteers. Having a mix of short-term and long-term goals creates some early accomplishments that will keep the team motivated while it tackles the longer-term goals.
- **Timeline.** Create a timeline of activities, and set monthly or quarterly implementation milestones.
- **Assistance.** Ask for help when you need it. See the *School Health Index* Resources section for information on national organizations that might be of assistance. Look for help from the school district, the state department of education, and local universities.
- **Monitoring progress.** Ongoing monitoring of activities and strategies is essential for smooth and successful implementation. Special achievements and problems should be recognized and discussed.
- **Reporting progress.** Establish a mechanism for reporting progress so that there is some level of accountability.
- **Recognition.** Recognize your volunteers. Write letters of appreciation and publicize their good work so that the entire community will know about their contributions.
- **Money.** If you need money but it is not available at the school, don't be shy about visiting local businesses, especially if you need an amount under $1,000. Write a two-page proposal that uses data, such as the data presented in Appendix 1.

Step 4: Reassess Annually and Strive for Continuous Improvement

Establish an annual *School Health Index* assessment. An annual assessment will ensure that students' health remains high on the school agenda. Take the time to measure and recognize the progress and accomplishments of the previous school year. Report annually to the principal, the superintendent, and the school board on progress made during the past year and plans set for the upcoming year